



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVIEW GUIDE

(Form and Instructions)

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For questions or additional information, email us at technicalassistance@bwjp.org

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Talking about Domestic Violence

This interview guide is designed to help you identify domestic violence and coercive controlling behaviors in family law cases. It should be used with all adults who are parties, or who play a parental role in a case, regardless of gender, marital status, sexual orientation, or parenting status. Screening for domestic violence is often complicated by the fact that victims: (1) may not know why it might be in the interests of their children or themselves to disclose abuse; (2) may be unclear or concerned about the ramifications of disclosure; (3) may not trust you with information about domestic violence, in spite your good intentions; and (4) may not perceive that their current level of risk warrants disclosure. For these and other reasons, victims are often reluctant to disclose abuse. Screening for domestic violence, therefore, is not a one-time event, but should occur periodically over the course of your involvement in the case. Bear in mind that talking about abuse may be an emotionally difficult experience for the interviewee, as well as for you. It is important to plan accordingly.

Introduction to the Interviewing Guide

The **first column** of this guide seeks general information across seven broad topic areas: (1) personal interactions; (2) access to resources; (3) children and parenting; (4) control of daily life; (5) emotional abuse; (6) physical abuse; and (7) sexual abuse. Below each broad topic area are examples of the kinds of things you might ask about in order to help you identify whether domestic violence is, or may be, present. Research shows that asking behaviorally specific questions is the most effective method of screening for abuse and coercive control.

Learning about these seven broad topic areas can help you identify important issues in the case. It can help you assess the relative capacities of the parties to meaningfully participate in alternative dispute resolution processes. It can help you recognize the kinds of protections that ought to be put in place to ensure that court proceedings are safe and effective. And, it can help you and the parties with whom you are working to determine together what the most beneficial and realistic outcomes might be for themselves and their children.

The **second column** suggests follow-up areas to explore when any domestic violence issues are identified or disclosed under column one. These discussion areas will help you gain a deeper understanding of the nature, context, severity and implications of domestic violence and coercive controlling behaviors.

The **third column** contains a checklist of key concepts, behaviors, and dynamics to listen for in the narrative responses to the questions asked in columns one and two.

Practical Considerations

For safety reasons, care must be taken in determining where, when and how to conduct this interview. *The interview should not be conducted in the presence or proximity of any other party or interested person unless s/he is an advocate or support person and it is determined that the*

presence of that person will not create any confidentiality problems or threaten any applicable professional privilege, such as the attorney-client privilege.

Before conducting the interview, you should explain to the interviewee:

- (1) That the professional standards that guide your work require that you look into certain issues in every case, including domestic violence, and that knowing about any history of domestic violence will help you carry out your functions and fulfill your professional responsibilities.
- (2) What your specific role and function is in relation to the case, including:
 - ☐ What you were appointed, hired or referred to do;
 - ☐ How you intend to do it;
 - ☐ What you will and won't share with the court, the opposing party, and others; and
 - ☐ Whether the information will appear in the record and/or a pleading or report.
- (3) The scope and/or limits of confidentiality and your duty to report suspected child abuse and certain serious crimes.

If a person discloses domestic violence, you should:

- (1) Obtain as much information as possible in order to fully understand its implications, without confining yourself to the topics listed in this guide;
- (2) Assess with the person the risks s/he may be facing, including risks of injury, death or other dangers, especially those arising from disclosing abuse; and
- (3) Refer the person to a qualified domestic violence advocate for safety planning assistance and a more in-depth risk assessment, as appropriate.

Remember that risk from domestic violence is never static, that it is difficult to predict, that it can fluctuate over time, *and that it often escalates once it has been disclosed and/or the parties separate.*

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Adapted from *Client Screening to Identify Domestic Violence Victimization*, Domestic Abuse Committee of the Family Law Section of the Minnesota State Bar Association, 2010; Holtzworth-Munroe, Beck & Applegate (2010), *Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns*; and Janet Johnston, et al., *IN THE NAME OF THE CHILD* (2d ed.), Springer Publishing Co., 2009.

1. Personal Interactions	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. Let's start by talking about your current relationship with ____.	1. Quality of interactions a. Ability to express views b. Trust in other's judgment c. Reliance on other's word d. Cost of disagreement e. Post-separation changes	<input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy <input type="checkbox"/> Control <input type="checkbox"/> Balance of power <input type="checkbox"/> Fear/danger/safety <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerability
B. How comfortable are you interacting with ____ now? <input type="checkbox"/> Being alone together <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting face-to-face <input type="checkbox"/> Talking by phone <input type="checkbox"/> Emailing or texting <input type="checkbox"/> Public encounters	2. Prior separations 3. Snapshots a. Happiest moments b. Most worrisome moment c. Scariest moments 4. Decision-making history	<input type="checkbox"/> Dependability/predictability <input type="checkbox"/> Dis/honesty/deception <input type="checkbox"/> Dis/respect <input type="checkbox"/> Manipulation <input type="checkbox"/> Coercion/intimidation <input type="checkbox"/> Degradation/humiliation <input type="checkbox"/> Sabotage <input type="checkbox"/> Surveillance
C. Do you have any concerns, fears or anxieties that I should be aware of?	5. Stressors a. Violence b. Alcohol/drugs c. Physical/mental health d. Criminal activity e. Poverty	<input type="checkbox"/> Volatility <input type="checkbox"/> Jealousy/possessiveness <input type="checkbox"/> Entitlement
D. What worries you most?		
2. Access to Resources	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. I'd like to get a sense of your economic wellbeing.	1. History/detail	<input type="checkbox"/> Control/Rulemaking <input type="checkbox"/> Dependence <input type="checkbox"/> Isolation
B. Do you have access to your own resources, like money, bank accounts, food, housing, transportation and healthcare?	2. Ability to meet basic needs 3. Ability to meet obligations	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial of financial support <input type="checkbox"/> Child abuse/neglect <input type="checkbox"/> Child dependency
C. Who decides how you spend your money and manage your financial affairs?	4. Recent changes	<input type="checkbox"/> Blackmail <input type="checkbox"/> Financial sabotage <input type="checkbox"/> Forced criminal activity <input type="checkbox"/> Prostitution/pornography <input type="checkbox"/> Theft/drug trafficking

3. Children/Parenting	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. Let's talk about your children.		<input type="checkbox"/> Direct physical abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Child sexual abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Moral corruption <input type="checkbox"/> Pornography <input type="checkbox"/> Racism/sexism <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal activity
B. Do you have any concerns about your children or fears for their safety?	1. What worries you most?	<input type="checkbox"/> Post-separation violence <input type="checkbox"/> Intimidation/trauma/terror <input type="checkbox"/> Children treated as property <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of attunement to kids <input type="checkbox"/> Denial of kids' feelings <input type="checkbox"/> Boundary violations
C. How are parenting time arrangements currently being worked out?	2. Capacity for joint decisions a. Common beliefs/values b. Parental involvement c. Trust in parental judgment d. Support of other parent e. Respect for other parent f. Nurture/support of kids g. Conflict resolution skills h. Developmental stage(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting styles <input type="checkbox"/> Inconsistent parenting <input type="checkbox"/> Erratic role reversals <input type="checkbox"/> Unstable home environment
D. Has _____ ever used or threatened to use the children to manipulate, control, or monitor you?	3. Interference with care 4. Undermining authority 5. Threats to: a. Take children away b. Harm children c. File CPS reports d. Deport e. Evict	<input type="checkbox"/> Minimizing kids' needs <input type="checkbox"/> Denying effects of violence <input type="checkbox"/> Punishing kids being kids <input type="checkbox"/> Criticizing kids being kids <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of empathy for kids <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing kids into abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Grilling kids for information <input type="checkbox"/> Using kids as weapons
E. How are your children doing now?	6. Post-separation changes	<input type="checkbox"/> Children acting out <input type="checkbox"/> Children using violence <input type="checkbox"/> Children mimicking abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Children withdrawn/clingy <input type="checkbox"/> Age-inappropriate behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Torn allegiances/loyalties <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in school work <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in social life

4. Control of Daily Life	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
A. I'd like to get a sense of how much freedom you have in your everyday life. <input type="checkbox"/> To come/go as you please <input type="checkbox"/> To manage your own time <input type="checkbox"/> To make own decisions <input type="checkbox"/> To set your own priorities <input type="checkbox"/> To interact with others Can you talk a little about that?	1. Detail 2. Frequency 3. Severity 4. Intent of other's behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Micro-management of life <input type="checkbox"/> Rulemaking <input type="checkbox"/> Demands for obedience <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance/resistance <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring/surveillance <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespect of privacy <input type="checkbox"/> Disregard of boundaries <input type="checkbox"/> Jealousy/possessiveness <input type="checkbox"/> Expectations of loyalty
B. Is there anything that gets in your way of doing the things you want or need to do?	5. Meaning of behavior to you	<input type="checkbox"/> Entitlement/privilege <input type="checkbox"/> Power/control/omnipotence
C. Has _____ ever: <input type="checkbox"/> Followed you <input type="checkbox"/> Often checked up on you <input type="checkbox"/> Examined your mail/email <input type="checkbox"/> Examined phone records <input type="checkbox"/> Hacked into email/accounts <input type="checkbox"/> Grilled you/timed activities <input type="checkbox"/> Used others to spy on you <input type="checkbox"/> Invaded your space/privacy <input type="checkbox"/> Misused social network sites	6. Effect on: a. Interactions b. Relationships c. Communications d. Self/children e. Parenting skills/capacities 7. Change: a. Over time b. Pre/post pregnancy c. Pre/post separation	<input type="checkbox"/> Fear/intimidation/dread <input type="checkbox"/> Danger/insecurity <input type="checkbox"/> Unpredictability/instability <input type="checkbox"/> Stalking <input type="checkbox"/> Hostage-taking <input type="checkbox"/> Trafficking
D. Has _____ ever physically restrained you, forbidden you from leaving, made you do things you didn't want to do, or punished you for defying his/her wishes?		
E. Has _____ ever shown up unannounced, contacted you against your will, or left something for you to find in order to scare or intimidate you?		

5. Sexual Abuse	Discussion Questions:	What to Listen For:
A. While it is uncomfortable to talk about these kinds of things, it's very important for me to know if _____ ever pressured or forced you to do sexual things that you did not want to do or that made you scared, uncomfortable, or ashamed. Has anything like that ever happened?	1. Detail	<input type="checkbox"/> Safety/risk/lethality
	2. In front of whom? <input type="checkbox"/> Children <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Co-workers <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Nobody – just in private	<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual assault/coercion <input type="checkbox"/> Degradation/humiliation <input type="checkbox"/> Use of pornography <input type="checkbox"/> Control/intimidation/terror <input type="checkbox"/> Escalation <input type="checkbox"/> Jealousy/possessiveness
B. Has _____ ever interfered with your decisions about birth control, pregnancy, and/or safe sex?	3. Frequency	<input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to negotiate <input type="checkbox"/> Relative bargaining power
	4. Severity	<input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to co-parent <input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to communicate
C. Has _____ ever used your image, or forced or pressured you to use your own image, to engage in sexting or pornography?	5. Intent of other's behavior	
	6. Meaning of behavior to you	<input type="checkbox"/> Danger to children <input type="checkbox"/> Moral corruption of kids
D. Is there anything else you think I should know about _____'s sexual behavior towards you?	7. Effect on: a. Interactions b. Relationships c. Communications d. Self/children e. Parenting skills/capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Impact on children <input type="checkbox"/> Threat of child abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma/fear/anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate boundaries
	8. Change: a. Over time b. Pre/post pregnancy c. Pre/post separation	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary perpetration <input type="checkbox"/> Offensive/defensive wounds <input type="checkbox"/> Proportionality of force <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal justice response <input type="checkbox"/> Protection orders <input type="checkbox"/> Defiance of authority
	9. Injuries	
	10. Medical attention	<input type="checkbox"/> Response to abuse
	11. Hospital visits	<input type="checkbox"/> Fight <input type="checkbox"/> Flight <input type="checkbox"/> Freeze
	12. Calls for help/to police	
	13. Arrests	
	14. Convictions/sanctions	
	15. Orders for protection	
	16. Protection order violations	

6. Physical Abuse	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
<p>A. Let's turn to your personal safety, both now and in the past. Has _____ ever used or threatened to use physical force or violence against you or the children?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hold, pin down, restrain <input type="checkbox"/> Kneel, stand or sit upon <input type="checkbox"/> Tie up, bind, gag</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Push, shove, shake, grab <input type="checkbox"/> Scratch, pull hair, shave hair <input type="checkbox"/> Twist arm</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bite <input type="checkbox"/> Spit on <input type="checkbox"/> Urinate upon</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Slap <input type="checkbox"/> Hit or punch <input type="checkbox"/> Kick or stomp <input type="checkbox"/> Strike w/ or throw object at</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Choke, strangle <input type="checkbox"/> Burn <input type="checkbox"/> Poke, stab, cut</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Withhold food/medication <input type="checkbox"/> Disable medical equipment</p> <p>B. What's the worst thing _____ has ever done to you?</p> <p>C. What's the scariest thing _____ has ever done to you?</p>	<p>1. Detail</p> <p>2. In front of whom? <input type="checkbox"/> Children <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Co-workers <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Nobody – just in private</p> <p>3. Frequency</p> <p>4. Severity</p> <p>5. Intent of other's behavior</p> <p>6. Meaning of behavior to you</p> <p>7. Effect on: a. Interactions b. Relationships c. Communications d. Self/children e. Parenting skills/capacity</p> <p>8. Change: a. Over time b. Pre/post pregnancy c. Pre/post separation</p> <p>9. Injuries</p> <p>10. Medical attention</p> <p>11. Hospital visits</p> <p>12. Calls for help/to police</p> <p>13. Arrests</p> <p>14. Convictions/sanctions</p> <p>15. Protection orders</p> <p>16. Protection order violations</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Safety/risk of danger <input type="checkbox"/> Potential lethality <input type="checkbox"/> Recent escalation <input type="checkbox"/> Fear/dread/doom</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Control, intimidation <input type="checkbox"/> Manipulation <input type="checkbox"/> Entitlement/privilege/power <input type="checkbox"/> Rulemaking <input type="checkbox"/> Demands for obedience <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance/resistance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Humiliation <input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy/personhood <input type="checkbox"/> Equity/trust/security <input type="checkbox"/> Predictability/stability <input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to negotiate <input type="checkbox"/> Relative bargaining power</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to co-parent <input type="checkbox"/> Capacity to communicate <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to meet kids' needs <input type="checkbox"/> Differentiation of self/other <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma/fear/anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy attachments <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate boundaries <input type="checkbox"/> Perspective of children</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness <input type="checkbox"/> Futility</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Primary aggressor <input type="checkbox"/> Proportionality of force <input type="checkbox"/> Offensive/defensive wounds <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal justice interveners <input type="checkbox"/> Defiance of authority</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Response to abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Fight <input type="checkbox"/> Flight <input type="checkbox"/> Freeze</p>

7. Emotional Abuse	Discussion Areas:	What to Listen For:
<p>A. Let's talk more about how you and _____ relate to one another. Can you describe how _____ treats you as a person?</p> <p>B. Does _____ ever:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Insult you or put you down</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ridicule you in public</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Purposely humiliate you</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Play mind games</p> <p>C. Does _____ ever:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Intimidate you</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yell or scream at you</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Act aggressively toward you</p> <p>D. Does _____ ever:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Get jealous or possessive</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Accuse you of infidelity</p> <p>E. Does _____ ever interfere with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Your work/school life</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Your social life</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Your sleep</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Your healthcare/medications</p> <p>F. Has _____ ever threatened to:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Kill you or the children</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Kill him/herself</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Harm you or the children</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Harm someone you care for</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Harm or kill pets</p> <p>G. Has _____ ever:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Destroyed your property</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Threatened you w/ weapon</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Put your life in danger</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Disabled car/equipment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Driven recklessly to scare</p>	<p>1. Detail</p> <p>2. In front of whom?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Children</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Family</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Friends</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Co-workers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Public</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nobody – just in private</p> <p>3. Frequency</p> <p>4. Severity</p> <p>5. Intent of other's behavior</p> <p>6. Meaning of behavior to you</p> <p>7. Effect on:</p> <p>a. Interactions</p> <p>b. Relationships</p> <p>c. Communications</p> <p>d. Self/children</p> <p>e. Parenting skills/capacities</p> <p>8. Change:</p> <p>a. Over time</p> <p>b. Pre/post pregnancy</p> <p>c. Pre/post separation</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Attacks on sanity</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Attacks on dignity</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Extreme cruelty</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Humiliation/embarrassment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Entrapment/paralysis</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness/futility</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Trauma/fear/anxiety</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sabotage</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Obsessive jealousy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Narcissism</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Entitlement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Blackmail</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Access to weapons</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Seemingly innocent acts with hidden meaning</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Response to abuse</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fight</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Flight</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Freeze</p>

Implications of Domestic Violence for Safety and Parenting:

Immediate Safety Concerns:

See Risk Assessment Factors and Questions 1(A)-(D), 3(B), 4(E), 5(F)-(G), 6(A)-(C), 7(A)-(D)

Immediate Economic Concerns:

See Questions 2(A)-(C), 4(C), 5(E)

Immediate Parenting Concerns:

See Questions 1(A)-(C), 2(A)-(C), 3(A)-(E), 4(A)-(E), 5(E)-(G), 6(A)-(C), 7(A)-(D)

Long-Term Concerns:

Risk Assessment Factors:

- ☐ Increase in frequency/severity
- ☐ Access to firearms
- ☐ Recent separation
- ☐ Unemployment
- ☐ Use or threat to use lethal weapon
- ☐ Threat to kill
- ☐ Avoidance of arrest for dom.viol.
- ☐ Step-children
- ☐ Forced sex
- ☐ Attempted strangulation
- ☐ Illegal drug use
- ☐ Alcohol dependency
- ☐ Control of daily activities
- ☐ Violent or constant jealousy
- ☐ Assault during pregnancy
- ☐ Threatened or attempted suicide
- ☐ Threat to harm children
- ☐ Belief in capacity to kill
- ☐ Stalking
- ☐ Major mental illness